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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the school superintendency in British Columbia from 1979 through 1987, which has been a time of change from provincial to local employment of superintendents. Research explored the turnover and attrition among superintendents and the activities subsequent to their departure. Such demographic data were gathered from Ministry of Education records and from interviews with personnel. The present status of the superintendency, the circumstances of recent years, the scene across Canada, and future imperatives were investigated through indepth interviews of 42 respondents throughout British Columbia and from other provinces. Of the 129 individuals who held a superintendency for some time during the 9-year period, 66 reamin in the British Columbia superintendency. Twenty-one retired after full service and 46 went to other positions and activities on departure; only four have reentered since departure in this province. A position in the Ministry of Education is no longer available as a career option for superintendents. Only those employed previously as district superintendents by the Ministry could make such a move after the introduction of local employment. The study identifies superintendents' perceptions of the position and its circumstances and demands; the future of the position is considered by examining key skills seen by the respondents as essential. The study offers recommendations for recruitment and selection procedures, conditions of employment, and preparation. There is need for further research into the superintendent's "political statesman" role, which was perceived by many respondents as crucial. Tables of research data and two reference pages are included. (Author/CJH)

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CURRENT ISSUES

IN THE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENCY IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Report of a Study

carried out with the assistance of

The Association of B.C. School Superintendents

and

The Ministry of Education, Province of British Columbia

by

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We need some stability and predictability in the system--it's so damn difficult to plan strategically when you're on quicksand. (Superintendent of a small interior district, 1987).

You have to know your terrain before you cross it. You have to have the ability to sense--and wait or change if necessary. (Long-serving superintendent, 1987).

[Superintendents] will have to learn to operate in an atmosphere of conflict, rather than cooperation; to exert influence rather than wield power; to use mechanisms of consultation to assess the real values of the public; to carry out policy research, and specifically to propose policies and programmes which are consistent with the best data available, and to defend these in contexts hostile to authority deriving from expertise; and above all to be flexible in making rapid adjustments when the outcomes . . . are disappointing (Coleman, 1977, p. 86).

You know what you want to accomplish for the district. You <u>feel</u> the district--you know it to its uttermost edges. You know the trouble spots. When someone screws up, it's a little bit of you that's hurting, because you're part of the school district (Experienced superintendent, 1987).

ABSTRACT

This study examines the recent and current situation in the school superintendency in British Columbia focussing on the nine-year period from 1979 through 1987, from the time of a change from provincial to local employment of superintendents. The study examines turnover and attrition among superintendents and the activities subsequent to departure of those who left the superintendency during the period.

Demographic data regarding turnover and attrition were gathered by examining Ministry of Education records and interviewing Ministry personnel. The superintendency as it is presently, the circumstances of recent years, the scene across Canada and the imperatives of the future were investigated through in-depth, semi-structured interviews of 42 individuals throughout British Columbia and from other Canadian provinces.

Of the 129 individuals who held a superintendency for some period of time during this nine-year period, 66 remain in the B.C. superintendency. Twenty-one retired after full service, while 46 went to other positions and activities on departure. The study found little evidence for the possibility of a return to the B.C. superintendency after departure; only four who left during the period have re-entered the position in this province. The study also found that a previous career option for some--a position in the Ministry of Education--is no longer available to superintendents. Only those who were previously employed by the Ministry as district superintendents were able to make such a move after the introduction of local employment.

The study examined the superintendency from the point of those in

it and around it: superintendents, assistant superintendents, trustees, trustee association officials and Ministry personnel. It identified superintendents' perceptions of the position and its circumstances and demands, and considered the future of the superintendency by examining key skills seen by respondents as essential.

The study's recommendations relate primarily to search, selection, appointment, and entry, to the conditions of employment and to preparation for the superintendency. The study identified a need for further research into the "political statesman" role of the superintendent, which was seen by many respondents as crucial.

FOREWORD

This study could not have been completed without the encouragement of the Association of B.C. Superintendents of Schools, the willing participation of its member superintendents and the support of the Ministry of Education. The assistance of Bill Fisher, Superintendent of Schools in School District No. 33 (Chilliwack) and Duane Sutherland, Superintendent of Schools in School District No. 2 (Cranbrook) in developing the study and of Don Smyth of the Ministry of Education in gathering data was of significant help. Appreciation is also extended to staff of the Ministry and the B.C. School Trustees Association, to the school trustees who participated in the collection of data and to the several superintendents who read the entire study and provided editorial advice before publication.

The project was challenging; the experience was professionally and personally most worthwhile. It is hoped that this study will contribute to the further development of effective leadership in British Columbia school districts.

Special thanks are due to Brian Hilsen for a comprehensive review of the literature and to Sharon Kucey for her competent, prompt work on the typing.

Vernon J. Storey

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1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The period from 1979 to the present has been one of major structural and situational change in the school superintendency in British Columbia. In 1979, the senior education officer in the great majority of school districts was a district superintendent of schools; employed by the Ministry of Education, assigned to a district and designated as one of two executive officers of the board of school trustees.

Today, the provincially employed district superintendent has virtually disappeared. The superintendent of schools is employed directly by the board and in the majority of school districts is designated chief executive officer.

These structural changes, significant though they are, must be seen in the context of change in the political, economic and social setting of education in British Columbia in the 1980's. Let history rule on whether the turbulence of the past few years was unique; that it has been major and significant seems not in dispute. The history of the superintendency has been documented in other reports; this study focusses on the men and women who have been superintendents since 1979 and on the issues they and public education must address daily.

It is also clear that as the face of the superintendency has changed, so have the people. The most obvious but certainly not the only change has been in the number who have left the superintendency for reasons ranging from retirement after long service to termination by the board. Twenty of the seventy-four individuals (27%) who were

provincial district superintendents in 1979 were still superintendents of schools in 1987. Of the other fifty-four, twenty (27%) have left for full retirement. Thirty-four (45.9%) have left for other reasons and a variety of occupations, as detailed elsewhere in this report. Forty-two (76.4%) of the fifty-five individuals who entered the superintendency after 1979 remained superintendents in 1987. Of the thirteen (23.6%) who left, only one went to full retirement.

The issues of recent years and a recognition of the key role of senior leadership in education led to the development of this research project. The study has sought to clarify the issues, to describe clearly the nature of a contemporary superintendent's work and to offer recommendations and prospects for the immediate future.

The study was supported by the Association of B.C. School Superintendents and the British Columbia Ministry of Education. It seeks to describe the superintendency as seen in the literature and through the eyes of the superintendents, assistant superintendents and others most closely involved.

2. THE SUPERINTENDENCY IN PROFILE: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Superintendents in British Columbia operate in a setting born uniquely out of history: the recent history of public policy and public education in British Columbia and the lengthy history of the superintendency across North America.

The importance of this historical background to an understanding of the superintendency in 1987 is fully acknowledged. However, the present study is not primarily historical in nature. In general, the focus of the literature review will be on the superintendency of recent years. Historical references are provided as necessary to enhance understanding.

Fleming has written a comprehensive historical analysis (Department of Administrative, Adult and Higher Education, 1986) of the development of the superintendency in British Columbia which provides a basis for an examination of the current scene. Tyack and Hansot (1982) have provided a North American perspective in their documentation of the superintendency in the United States during the period 1820 to 1980.

In a sense, though with its roots in the historical ground tilled previously, this study begins in time where others end. It is by design an analysis of the work of today's superintendents in today's British Columbia. Yet, as an examination elsewhere in this report of the situation in at least one other Canadian province will show, its findings may be useful beyond the borders of this province. Further, as

the literature reviewed will indicate, the superintendency in British Columbia is also in many respects the superintendency elsewhere.

Fleming (Department of Administrative, Adult and Higher Education, 1986) ends his historical review of the development of the superintendency in British Columbia with an observation which provides a timely introduction to the content of the present study:

> . . . the men and women who became the first generation of superintendents to be locally employed, inherited an educational world in turmoil, a world often in disagreement over the direction schools should take. They became chief executive officers for school boards just as the tide of public support for education was beginning to ebb, and just as community skepticism about the effectiveness of all institutions and experts was on the rise. Unlike the inspectors and government superintendents they replaced, they would not be protected from the hurly-burly of school board and community politics by the talisman of Department authority. All assumed their roles as school leaders not as members of a team headquartered and reinforced in Victoria, but as individuals largely dependent on their own experience, wisdom and skill.

While there were already seven locally-employed superintendents with no Ministry ties at the beginning of the move to local employment in 1979, and while the strength of the "reinforcement from headquarters" would be called into question by some incumbents, Fleming's description of the scene in the early 1980's is apt.

Understanding the School Board

The Role of the Board

> . . . to explain the turnover among superintendents, we would do better to examine the unique political cultures of specific school

> districts than to rely on general theories of conflict (Cuban, 1985).

If one is to understand the superintendency, it is important to know something about school boards. Further, to understand the British Columbia superintendency, one must know something about the socio-political context in which both British Columbia boards and superintendents work.

The question "What is the function of the school board?" is frequently answered, "To develop policy." Subsequent questions are likely to arise: Policy about what? From what base of information? and, What else do they do?

Coleman, referring to an urban Canadian system, has provided the partial answer that the board "must determine the values and preferences of their constituents, and use these to guide the development of policies" (1977, p. 85).

Hickcox (June, 1974), formerly a school trustee himself, has suggested two aspects of the trustees' role. First, he asserts that the trustee is

> the translator of general community needs for education. Somehow the trustee has to take the pulse of the community . . . It is, after all, the trustees who will marshal the community support for education. (pp. 36, 37)

The point Hickcox has raised regarding the proactive role of the trustee and, corporately, the board in identifying community needs is widely discussed in the literature. However, their role in marshalling community support for education is not as evident a theme in the literature as perhaps in practice.

Hickcox has also asserted that the role of trustees has been eroded, and that

> a paramount task for trustees now is to maintain a position as the guardian of local control and the reflector of community needs in the face of a genuine shift of power to the professionals and to the central authority.

Superintendents in British Columbia might question the definition of "professionals" as net gainers of power, but might agree with Hickcox's observation about centralization. Coleman (1977) has presented a different view, stating that

> Net losers of power in Canada have been provincial governments, trustees and administrators; net gainers have been teachers and their associations, special interest groups of various kinds, parents, and to some extent students. (p. 79)

The rapidity of change in education finance and financial administration and in legislation in British Columbia leaves open the question of who might be included in a list of net gainers and losers of power. On balance, Hickcox's (1974, p. 36) observation of a shift of power to the central authority is probably valid when applied to the present scene in British Columbia, as is Coleman's inclusion of "special interest groups of various kinds" (p. 79).

Robert Greenleaf (1977) has used the term "manage"--one not commonly applied to trustees--to describe their function. He refers for his definition to the latin root "manus," meaning "the hand on the rein that guides the horse" (p. 93). Greenleaf asserts that

> The role of trustees is to stand outside the active program of the institution and to manage. What they delegate to the inside operating executives is administration. (p. 94)

Greenleaf has identified four major trustee functions:

> a. To set the goals . . . to define the obligations and the general premises--or the concept--of the institution, and to approve plans for reaching goals . . .
> b. To appoint the top administrative officers, to design the top administrative structure . . .
> c. To assess, at appropriate times, the performance of the institution . . .
> d. To take appropriate action based on what is found in the above assessment. (1977, pp. 94-95)

Clearly, the board's fundamental role is that of setting policy. Writing in a trustees' professional journal, Smith (1982, p. 23) asserted that "the board's responsibility is to determine policy; the superintendent's responsibility is to administer that policy" (p. 23). In a later issue of the same journal, Zakariya (1983, p. 28) has stated that "board policy spells out the what, why and how much; the superintendent handles the who, where, when and how."

Many discussions of board responsibility focus on this policy-administration distinction. While substantial separation between these two functions is essential, working relationships will almost always carry a degree of overlap. This topic will be examined further in a subsequent section of this review which deals with board-superintendent relationships.

Similarity and Uniqueness

School boards in British Columbia consist of five, seven or nine member trustees. Until 1986, they were elected for two-year terms. In most districts, about half the board was elected each year. Legislation introduced in 1987, however, will result in trustees being elected

triennially by 1990, with the entire board elected at once. The future impact of this change remains to be seen, but it seems reasonable to predict an increased in organized political activity, perhaps aligned in some cases with provincial parties, surrounding school board election.

Beyond the rules of governance and the duties and responsibility of boards under the School Act, it would be difficult to formulate a description which could be titled "The British Columbia School Board." At least four sets of variables make each school board in this province, and probably elsewhere, a unique entity. These might be designated as (a) district factors, (b) community politics and priorities, (c) trustee personalities and values and (d) the broader political context.

District Factors

School districts in British Columbia range from isolated, often far-flung units of fewer than six schools and less than 2,500 students, to the 48,000-pupil School District No. 39 (Vancouver). The modal district enrols approximately 7,000 pupils (Storey, 1979, p. 61). Figure 1 shows the range of districts by enrolment and number of schools.

Rural-urban differences among districts also contribute to their individuality. The geography of the province has contributed to a skewed population distribution with a major concentration in the Vancouver-lower Fraser Valley-Southern Vancouver Island area. There are only a few centres of medium size, such as Prince George,

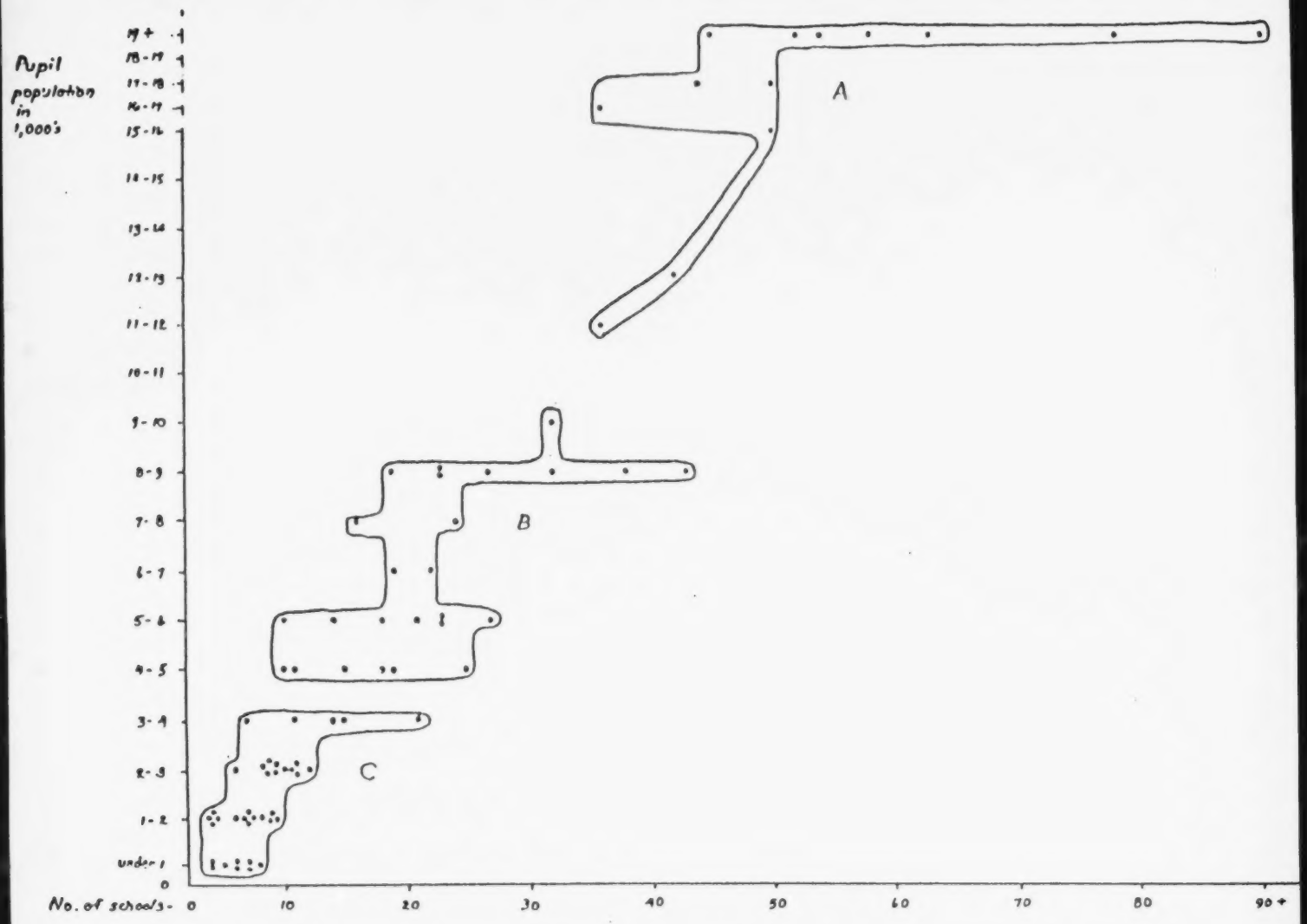

Figure 4

Pupil Populations and Numbers of Schools
in British Columbia School Districts

Kamloops and Kelowna in the rest of the province. Heavy reliance on the primary industries of forestry and mining have also contributed to the distribution of population throughout the province. Logically, there is widespread district-to-district focus on some basic issues, and great disparity of interest on many others.

Community Politics and Priorities

As noted above, it would be less than useful to develop a description of the typical British Columbia school board. In addition to demographic differences which contribute to dissimilarity among districts, local politics and priorities appear to play a significant role.

Blumberg and Blumberg, in their analysis of the superintendency, have presented a view of the position that hinges on the conflictual nature of the job. They assert that

> one cannot understand what the superintendency is all about unless one also knows that the undercurrents that move the position and the person in it are almost always conflictual in nature. (1985, p. 2).

This analysis is confirmed by Cuban (September, 1985, p. 28), who has referred to conflict as "the DNA of the superintendency." It seems reasonable to suggest that an understanding of the sources of conflict may be relevant to an examination of current issues in the superintendency.

Community politics and priorities appear to have a major influence on the make-up and operation of the board. McCarty and Ramsey (1971) have developed a useful analytical model (Fig. 2) which is relevant to

both board and community. This model of power and conflict identifies four basic types of boards and profiles the communities which shape each type. McCarty and Ramsey conclude that the nature of the community and the board will require a particular stance or style on the part of the superintendent.

Figure 2

Model of Power and Conflict

Types of Communities	Types of Boards	Roles of the Professional
Dominated	Dominated	Functionary
Factional	Factional	Political strategist
Pluralistic	Status congruent	Professional adviser
Inert	Sanctioning	Decision-Maker

Source: McCarty and Ramsey, 1971, pp. 17-22

McCarty and Ramsey's model merits discussion. The authors have advanced four theses:

> One . . . is that power varies from one community to another in patterns capable of description . . . A second . . . is that community power is held over members of community-wide boards and over professionals implementing the policies of those boards . . . A third thesis of this work is that the power relationship is seen most directly

> through the interaction and relationships between community power figures, community-wide boards, and professionals, with these relationships constituting a power structure. . . . A fourth thesis . . . is that the power structure . . . itself varies, and that this variation forms various patterns some of which allow people to adjust to and predict the situation, and others which do not.

This model of power and conflict has three major variables: the community, the board and the professionals.

Dominated power structure. In this situation, power is concentrated in the hands of a few members of the community, frequently the economic elite. Opposition viewpoints have little impact on the board. Decision-making is dominated by the holders of community power, who exercise significant control over board policy.

The authors have used the term "functionary" to describe the superintendent working for a dominated board. Given the pejorative connotation of the word, "implementer" may be more appropriate. Whether as a result of philosophical agreement, survival instinct, or both, the superintendent's major priority is to carry out the directives of the board in a context of unanimity or domination by powerful members.

Factional power structure. This community setting is a variant of the dominated structure in that power remains concentrated in the hands of a few. The factional community, however, includes two or more enduring power factions, each bound together on the basis of unifying factors such as religion, politics or economics. Interest in school board elections is strong, the balance of power often shifts after an election, and debate and subsequent voting on the factional board reflect the ideological ground on which trustees stand. The

superintendent, who must function as a political strategist, takes direction from the majority but avoids becoming closely identified with one faction. Acknowledging that "4-3" can easily become "3-4," he allows room for movement on controversial issues.

Pluralistic power structure. In this diffused or dispersed setting, decision-making power and influence are contestable. Involvement in school affairs may be widespread, with many community groups displaying interest.

The status congruent board is likely to be characterized by full discussion before voting, and by recognition of the freedom of the individual trustee. The superintendent performs a statesmanlike role as professional advisor, presenting to an active, open-minded board his best educational advice supported by alternatives and implications.

Inert power structure. In this case, domination is more likely to be exercised by the status quo than by power centres. Experimentation and risk-taking are the exception rather than the rule, and essential community offices are as likely to be filled on the basis of willingness as qualification. The sanctioning board usually performs in routine fashion, simply approving or disapproving recommended policies and actions. In this setting, the superintendent is not only free to make decisions; he is compelled to act if effective decision-making is to take place. The board both seeks and accepts direction, often acting simply as a confirming agent.

Clearly, there are no "pure" types, whether community, board or superintendent. All four boards, for example, are likely to expect from

their superintendent the presentation of options for and implications of their decisions.

Trustee Personalities and Values

The literature does not offer a particular focus on the individual trustee. This is perhaps logical, since boards are corporate units and the individual trustee is a part of that unit. It seems reasonable, however, to suggest that the individual trustee whose style creates difficulties for the board may also complicate the superintendent's life. Kipp (1981), in a trustees' professional journal article, has noted characteristics of superintendents and of trustees which, if present, promote difficulties in superintendent-trustee relationships. He suggests that board frustration is increased by the superintendent who does not keep the board informed, who alienates parents or who "blows his own horn" (p. 35). A trustee, on the other hand, can create frustration for the superintendent by a number of behaviors which suggest both role confusion and political reality: involvement in district administration, efforts to enhance a personal image, pressures for special treatment for friends, and expressions of opinion on behalf of the board without board approval. It might be fair to suggest that these behaviors frustrate not only superintendents but also fellow trustees.

The Broader Political Context

School boards in British Columbia are creatures of the provincial government. They are established, authorized and directed by

legislation and by government policy and administrative practice. Their powers and responsibilities have been stipulated in the School Act and more recently by legislation relating to educational finance, labor relations and the teaching profession.

Observations of a trend toward provincial control may apply to the current scene in British Columbia; most noticeably, perhaps, in the area of board versus provincial control over the level of funding for education. Any shift in the balance of power between boards and the provincial government seems likely to produce uncertainty, conflict and overt political response. A recent study (Department of Administrative, Adult and Higher Education, 1986, p. 64) has observed that

> Recently, the relationship between local district and provincial government have been characterized by confrontation, by grabs for power, by attempts to control and attempts to avoid control, and by competitions for the support of the voting public. Some [boards and] superintendents have chosen to be actively and openly involved in these inter-governmental skirmishes. Others have chosen to remain in the background.

Changing public attitudes toward social institutions, policies and programs of fiscal restraint and the rise of advocacy and special-interest groups are phenomena not limited to British Columbia. Action taken by boards and by government to resolve controversial issues meet with both support and opposition from constituents, from staff and in some instances from students.

Today's board and superintendent face a world infinitely more complex economically, politically, socially and educationally, than the world of their predecessors. Dealing with the new reality places high demands on both school boards and superintendents; that the current

scene is one of uncertainty and rapid change is not surprising. The expectations and demands facing the school superintendent in British Columbia may not be qualitatively different from those facing their counterparts in other jurisdictions. Combined with the recent changes in the superintendency in this province, though, they have contributed to a turbulence that requires closer examination.

Understanding the Superintendency

Introduction

> If there is any educational leader at the school district level charged with the task of inspiring and coordinating . . ., it is the school superintendent. Since the pattern of business-as-usual . . . was challenged, local school chiefs have faced a multitude of new actors in school politics and a bewildering array of new regulations and programs. Lightning rod for protest, negotiator for contending groups both within and outside the schools, the superintendent is still responsible for the effectiveness of instruction. (Tyack and Hansot, 1982, p. 256)

There is widespread agreement in the literature that the school superintendency is a complex, challenging and important job. It is also a position with a developmental history in North America of over 150 years.

Descriptions and conceptual models of the superintendency abound. Tyack and Hansot (1982) have prepared a comprehensive history of the American superintendency covering the period 1820 to 1970. Blumberg and

Blumberg (1985) and Cuban (1976) have written extensively about the theme of conflict in the superintendency. Campbell, Cunningham, Nystrand and Usdam (1985), McCarty and Ramsey (1971) and Cuban (1976) have presented analytical models for describing various roles of the superintendent.

This chapter will examine the roles of the superintendent as outlined in the literature. It will also review the dominant themes of conflict and the politics of the position. The topic of board-superintendent relationships will be discussed as an outgrowth of the other topics listed.

Roles of the Superintendent

While role analysis is useful in discussing the superintendency, its limitations have been clearly noted by Cuban:

> Attaching labels to roles and then tagging them onto people . . . implies a level of objective precision . . . Indeed, such categorizing seems presumptuous. Trying to capture dense, infinitely complex attitudes and behaviors in a simple label is bold, at best, given the available evidence. (1976, p. 143)

Bearing in mind this limitation, it may be useful to examine several role-oriented descriptions of the superintendency to gain a preliminary understanding of the position.

The framework provided by McCarty and Ramsey (1971) and discussed previously in this chapter is perhaps less a role description than an analysis of the leadership style of superintendents in relation to the types of communities and boards to which they relate. Their classification of superintendents according to their dominant pattern

of leadership behavior is useful, however, when the topics of conflict and the politics of the position are being considered. Superintendents have been classified as functionary, political strategist, professional adviser and decision-maker. Perhaps the least useful of these descriptors is the term decision-maker. Superintendents decide constantly; McCarty and Ramsey were referring to situations in which the superintendent rather than the board is the primary initiator of important, often policy-level decisions.

Carlson (1972, p. 138) has described superintendents in terms of their length of tenure, related primarily to the extent of completion of major tasks and projects. Carlson identifies superintendents as hoppers, specialists and statesmen. Hoppers are described as superintendents who move while there is still time and before the completion of any major work started. The specialist is described as a superintendent who moves after completing one or more major tasks identified early in his tenure. The statesman superintendent is described as moving only after having exhausted his capabilities in a particular system. This superintendent might move after coming to the conclusion that the challenges of the district needed new skills, perhaps perceiving that in the same vein, his abilities would best be put to use in another district.

Campbell, Cunningham, Nystrand and Usdam (1985) have developed a description of the superintendent's roles within two major categories. The first category they have labelled conceptual/analytical, and within this category they have identified two roles of the superintendent: social analyst and organizational diagnostician. These sense-making

roles focus, respectively, on the external and on the internal environment.

The second category these authors term the conceptual/active roles: the roles of planner and mediator. If the first set is primarily reflective and analytical, the second set is primarily active and dynamic. Unlike the roles outlined by McCarty and Ramsey, it appears that those proposed by Campbell et al., are to be filled both simultaneously and universally by superintendents.

Cuban (1976), in outlining steps leading to development of an analytical model describing the superintendent, cautions that

> The enormous diversity in cities, in the origin of school boards and superintendencies as well as political cultures, diminishes the number of generalizations that can be made about schoolmen's conceptions of leadership. (p. 115)

Cuban (1976) has presented three dominant and historically persistent conceptions of the key roles of the superintendent. He identifies these as teacher-scholar, administrative chief and negotiator-statesman. Elsewhere, he has identified these roles as teacher, manager and politician. The superintendent-teacher, he asserts, "serves as the fire-starter, because his or her goal is to alter the thinking and actions of board members, school personnel and the community at large" (September, 1985, p. 30). The managerial role, on the other hand, maintains organizational stability.

The question of the superintendent's political role has aroused considerable discussion, attributable largely to the idea that schools should be above politics and to a failure to define the term precisely

for the context in which it is being used. Cuban has referred to this aspect of the superintendents' work as "the art of the possible," asserting that

> In any public institution in which governance is shared between a lay board and a hired professional, the making of policy requires some level of political activity. In a school district, the decision-making process involves the school board, the superintendent, school faculties, and a host of other constituencies. Hammering out a consensus--and the tugging and pushing that accompany this process--are political activities. Superintendents are hip-deep in such activities because superintendents help to define district goals, which they then seek to achieve (September, 1985, p. 29).

As is the case with school boards, superintendencies share certain similarities and include unique factors. Tyack and Hansot (1982, pp. 256-257) have offered as examples of uniqueness the small town, the prosperous suburb and the big city, pointing out that the challenge facing the superintendent in each is unique. In one it may be to expand community horizons, in another to maintain support for public education, and in another to address problems of poverty, language and violence.

It is clear that the superintendency is a demanding position. Attempts to develop descriptive models outlining roles serve only partially to explain the complexity of the task facing the superintendent who in some respects

> is not unlike a juggler who, in order to keep a dozen objects in the air on a windy day, must constantly move about, keeping his eyes roving; he may be very uncertain that he has the whole dozen, but he doesn't dare stop to find out! (1976, p. 167)

It is evident in the literature that conflict in the superintendency is simply part of the job and that political acumen is an essential skill. Each of these terms, however, needs more thorough analysis to ensure common understanding.

Conflict in the Superintendency

The theme of conflict is pervasive in the literature. Cuban has asserted that "conflict is the DNA of the superintendency. It was present from the beginning." (September, 1985, p. 28). With reference to the superintendents he studied, Cuban observed that

> there was a perpetual crossfire of expectations, requests and demands from board members, middle-level administrators, principals, teachers, students and different civic groups (1976, p. 167).

It should be understood that the term conflict, refers primarily to conflicting demands and opinions, not to interpersonal conflict. However, interpersonal conflict may in some instances be an outcome of the pressures created by conflicting demands and viewpoints.

The primary sources of potential conflict might be identified as community and societal, intraorganizational and board-superintendent. It is the response to and handling of conflict that calls upon the superintendent's political acumen as he seeks severally and paradoxically to "provoke, contain and repress conflict" (Cuban, 1985, p. 30).

Community and Societal Pressures

Recent years have been characterized by both breadth and strength of demand. Advocacy groups and general demand have led to the provision of a broad array of educational services: programs for handicapped and gifted children, French immersion, updated electives and computer science education, to name a few. In addition, school boards and their superintendents face many requests from professional, civic and religious organizations for the inclusion of units and packages within an already-crowded curriculum. Each request requires a response; each response, particularly if it is negative, demands skills of mediation and conflict resolution.

Less easily documented are the shifting tides of public opinion about schools and indeed about organizations in general. Willis has observed that "In recent years, the cross-pressures in the politics of education have been reflected in changing parent-public attitudes toward schools" (1982, p. 14). In many instances, principals, school boards and superintendents of schools have been, in the public's eye, the representatives of public education. Seeking to act as lightning rods, they have sometimes been perceived as insulators by a public "hostile to the ideal of a stable 'closed system' run by professional managers and their experts" (Tyack and Hansot, 1982, p. 240).

Intraorganizational Sources of Conflict

The emerging pressures on school boards and their senior staffs from employee groups, particularly in post-Bills 19 and 20 British Columbia, might best be learned about in the annals of labour history

and collective bargaining. Depending on one's perspective, the likely scenario for the next few years in this province might be termed a coming of age, an overdue reform or a set of negative developments. There seems, however, little doubt that the nature of contractual relations between school boards and their employee groups will assume a very different character in many settings. Not only will the skills of conflict resolution and mediation be vital, but superintendents will also need the conceptual ability and technical knowledge to guide and oversee complex and sometimes troubled employee-employer relations.

It seems clear that "diffusion of power" is a useful phrase with which to describe a major trend in the governance and administration of public education. Coleman has asserted that "power is becoming widely distributed and neither boards nor other actors have reliable influence." (1977, p. 80)

It is tempting to conclude a discussion of societal and organizational pressures with an observation that superintendents seem the victims of enormous pressure. Such a conclusion would be in error. It is clear that superintendents recognize both conflict and the demands upon their skills in responding to that conflict. Realistically, there are a few who cannot cope. All realize that conflict is an ever-present, about-to-be-reality, and that "there is no assurance that the relative lack of conflict that they may experience on Monday will continue on Tuesday" (Blumberg and Blumberg, 1985, p. 190). As Cuban has graphically depicted that conflict is the DNA, or the "life-stuff" of the superintendency, so Blumberg and Blumberg, in

their report of an interview study of twenty-five superintendents, have pointed out that their subjects

> seem not to want to wish the conflict model of their job out of existence. For many of them, it offers high excitement and challenge (1985, p. 198).

Board-Superintendent Relations

Superintendents work for elected school boards whose members come into that office with a variety of skills, beliefs, motives and agendae. They come from all walks of life and hold widely differing views of education and educators. They serve for periods ranging from two years to more than ten years. Some view themselves as representing the community at large, others as agents of an organized special-interest group or political party. New legislation in British Columbia will see the potential for a complete or almost-complete change in board membership after an election.

That this ground holds the seeds of conflict seems self-evident. It seems reasonable to assume that expectations of what a superintendent should be and do are likely to change as circumstances change. Superintendents who recognize this reality face also the fact that their freedom to operate is tempered by the reality of the local scene. Boyd has indicated that

> educators are free to run the school system according to their professional desires and beliefs. However, when the authorities exceed the boundaries of the zone of tolerance (which may be broad or narrow, and clearly or poorly defined), they come into contact with values dear to the community and face the likelihood of controversy and opposition. (1974, p. 118)

As Cawelti (1982, p. 34) has suggested, the boundaries of the zone of tolerance may be tested by the intensity of certain major issues. Zald has suggested that it is "during the handling of major phase problems, or strategic decision points, that board power is mostly likely to be asserted" (1969, p. 121).

Another area of potential conflict is that of policy vs. administration. Difficulties may arise when the board moves strongly into the administrative area. Similarly, it is at his peril that the superintendent moves into the partisan political arena.

The Politics of the Position

Clearly, an understanding of the politics of education, and particularly of school districts, is essential for the superintendent. Yet traditionally, school people have held education to be "above" politics. Tyack and Hansot have observed that superintendents

> do not think of themselves as political men and they are not prepared by experience or ideology to engage in the hurly-burly of the political arena (1982, pp. 238, 239).

Yet, as Iannaconne and Lutz have pointed out,

> public decisions in education at the local district as well as other levels of government will not be made in a social vacuum but in a political arena with varying forces competing for advantage and public interest (1970, p. 16).

Superintendents are keenly aware of the political dimension of their positions. Greenhill (1977) has found that superintendents realized their political role and the competitive nature of local educational governance. Blumberg and Blumberg have suggested that the

superintendent "requires keen political sensitivity combined with shrewd political skills." These skills of identification, intervention, persuasion, mediation and conflict resolution have historically been in high demand. With the present as the most available reality, it would seem that the demand for political acumen is increasing rapidly.

Conclusion

This review has examined the roles of both boards and superintendents; not minutely, but with broad brushstrokes seeking to highlight areas which may provide insights into the current scene in British Columbia.

Clearly, the superintendent plays a pivotal role in the local leadership of public education. This review has focussed on some key aspects of the position, painting them as a backdrop to the superintendent's educational leadership responsibility. As Campbell et al. have pointed out

> the superintendent has a political role, but it is a political role with educational underpinnings . . . If superintendents of schools do not make the case for public education and wage the fight for community support, there will be a serious void in many communities . . . Board members and other lay citizens may become community spokespeople for education, but behind them a catalytic agent is needed and for that role the spotlight is on the superintendent. (1985, p. 214)

3. IDENTIFYING THE ISSUES

Research Questions

Seven research questions were drafted after preliminary discussions about the topic of study. They were:

1. What is the current situation with regard to turnover and attrition in the school superintendency in British Columbia (numbers, frequency, etc.)?

2. What are the major current issues, forces, trends and patterns affecting the superintendency?

3. What are the major reasons for the current pattern of turnover and attrition?

4. What are the major implications for education of continued discontinuities in senior school district leadership?

5. What are the perceived needs of superintendents as they seek to cope with, to respond to and to change the current pattern?

6. What recommendations for action by the major stakeholders (superintendents, school boards and the Ministry of Education) arise from the findings?

7. What is the current situation outside British Columbia? What are the major issues, forces and trends operating outside the province, and is the B.C. situation different?

Early in the data collection process, it became apparent that respondents were concerned about what they perceived to be the current situation with regard to superintendent search and selection procedures. Expressed attitudes ranged from mild amusement to

astonishment as superintendents described procedures followed in specific situations. None suggested that the concern was held with regard to all or most school districts recently involved in searches. However, the frequency with which the topic was raised led to the addition of the following cluster of questions:

8. What practices are followed in seeking and selecting a superintendent of schools? Does current practice in this province vary from what might be considered acceptable personnel practice? If so, in what ways does it differ?

The above research questions provided a framework within which interview questions could be developed and subsequent data analysis could be carried out. They also assisted in further review of the literature following data collection.

Research Design

It was originally intended that the research process would begin with a pilot study consisting of six to eight semi-structured interviews of superintendents currently in the position and one or two no longer employed as superintendents. These interviews and the review of the literature would provide the basis for a detailed questionnaire to be circulated to all superintendents. Following tabulation and analysis of the data, further interviews would be held if necessary to examine topics and issues identified by questionnaire data as needing further consideration.

Discussions with superintendents during the pilot study interviews made it clear that for at least four major reasons, changes in the

research design were necessary. It became apparent that unless these changes were made, it would be difficult to gather appropriate and useful data.

Preference for the Verbal

Almost without exception, superintendents were very willing to schedule time for an interview which they knew would take one and one-half to two hours to complete. They spoke frankly about their work and in many cases shared confidential information which was needed to provide explanatory background for the incidents and examples they related. Several stated at the end of the interview that it had been a worthwhile experience for them to converse about matters which they did not often have the opportunity to discuss and simply to talk about their job in response to questions.

It seems unlikely that these executives would have shared information in the amount and at the level of sensitivity of the data gathered in the interviews, had a questionnaire been used. The sheer volume of the responses necessary would have precluded an effective job being done. It was clear from superintendents' responses that they preferred the verbal interchange and the opportunity to explain, to amplify, to backtrack and to extend their responses. Several indicated this preference clearly to the researcher; a few stated simply that they would not have responded had the data been requested by questionnaire.

Nature of the Data

The second reason flows from the first. The only record of the interviews was the researcher's field notes. Any documents provided by the superintendent were handed directly to the researcher. No typing or mailing of materials, in other words, no third party involvement was necessary. The risk of disclosure was reduced significantly by this process and by the reassurance of confidentiality and anonymity.

Requests for Assistance with Research

Superintendents receive many requests to provide data for research studies. Usually, this assistance involves responding to a questionnaire. It is possible in most instances and more appropriate in many that another staff member provide the response. Nevertheless, the request is usually received by the superintendent, whose authorization for release of data is in many cases necessary.

In some instances, only the superintendent can provide the data. Approximately two years before the present study, British Columbia superintendents had been asked to respond to a survey instrument designed to yield demographic data about themselves and opinion about certain aspects of their jobs.

Less than six months prior to the beginning of the present study, superintendents had been asked to complete a lengthy questionnaire for the provincial trustees' organization. Again, the data could only have been provided by the superintendent. In addition, the researcher for the present study was also the researcher for the trustees' association project.

It was felt that the relative recency of the previous study of the superintendency (a fact noted by one superintendent) and the very recent request bearing the name of the present researcher would have lessened the likelihood of a desirable response to a questionnaire.

The Current Context

The fourth reason for the change from the initial research design related to a specific example of the pressures of a superintendent's job. Early in the data collection process, new and unexpected provincial legislation relating primarily to teachers was announced. The resulting dissent and upheaval and the possibility of errors committed by treading too quickly on unknown ground provided a graphic insight into the nature of the superintendency. These factors also created a need for superintendents to respond quickly and a resulting need for priorities to be set. No superintendent cancelled an interview; it seems unlikely that a written questionnaire would have been granted that level of priority.

For these reasons, the data collection strategy chosen was that of semi-structured, in-depth interviews. This process is described in more detail in the following section.

Date Collection Procedures

Data were collected by interview, using the research questions as the basis for a series of more specific interview questions. Within this framework, considerable latitude was provided for the respondent

to move the discussion in related directions not necessarily suggested by the question. In many cases, such discussion provided a lead-in or a partial response to a subsequent interview question.

The Respondents

Forty-two subjects were interviewed:

Present superintendents	19
Former superintendents	3
Assistant superintendents	4
School board chairmen	3
Ministry of Education staff	2
B.C. School Trustees Association staff	1
Deputy Ministers or designates - other provinces	10
Total	42

Thirty interviews were face-to-face; in most cases these were held in the superintendent's office. The remaining interviews, two with former superintendents and ten with deputy ministers or their designates from other provinces, were conducted by telephone.

Interviews were held during the Spring of 1987. The approximate total interview time was 65 hours; the total time required to carry out the interviews, including travel to various centres throughout British Columbia, was approximately 165 hours.

School districts represented ranged in size from rural districts of fewer than 2,500 pupils to very large metropolitan school districts.

Respondents were from most geographical areas of the province.

The interviews with deputy ministers or their designates focussed on research question 7--What is the current situation outside of B.C.? What are the major issues, forces and trends operating outside the province and is the B.C. situation different?

The interviews with four assistant superintendents were scheduled after it became apparent that search and selection procedures were a matter of concern to superintendents. Each of these respondents had competed for a superintendency within the previous eighteen months. One was involved in examining superintendent search and selection procedures. These open-ended interviews asked respondents to describe and comment on search and selection procedures with which they had been involved.

Interviews with school board chairmen were designed to obtain their perceptions of circumstances surrounding the departure of superintendents from school districts with which the chairmen were familiar. Interviews with Ministry of Education staff and B.C. School Trustees Association staff were intended to provide another perspective on the recent and current situation in the school superintendency in British Columbia.

Method of Recording Data

At the beginning of each interview, the respondent was assured of confidentiality. Respondents who shared information about specific events and circumstances were advised that their anonymity and that of the district would be protected.

Because of the potential sensitivity of both subjects and data, interviews were not taped. The researcher wrote extensive field notes, recording verbatim as much as possible. At no time did a respondent request that a statement not be recorded. On several occasions, however, respondents prefaced a particular statement by reiterating that it must remain confidential.

4. ON BEING A SUPERINTENDENT: FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Turnover and Attrition

This section of the study deals with the movement of superintendents between districts and with their departure from the superintendency. For the purposes of this study, terms have been defined as follows:

> Turnover: The movement of an individual from a position as superintendent of schools in a British Columbia school district to a position as superintendent of schools in another British Columbia school district.
>
> Attrition: The departure of a superintendent of schools in a British Columbia school district from the superintendency in British Columbia.

The term "attrition" applies regardless of the reasons for departure or the individual's occupational or other status on leaving the superintendency. It includes the initial departure of four individuals who subsequently re-entered the superintendency. It proved impossible to establish precisely the circumstances surrounding or reasons for a superintendent's departure from a school district. The term "status on departure" was used to include all situations of former superintendents after leaving the superintendency.

This section of the report presents the findings of a file search of published records and interviews with Ministry of Education personnel. It profiles the entry and experience patterns of superintendents and reports rates of departure of those who left and their status on departure and after.

Profile of the Survey Group

From 1979 to early 1987, 129 men and women have occupied the superintendency, not including those who have served as acting superintendents. With six exceptions, they have been male (95.4%). Over half of this group (74, or 57.4%) had entered the superintendency in 1979 or earlier, most as Ministry-employed district superintendents (Table 1). During the period 1979 to June 30, 1987, 67 of 129 superintendents, left the superintendency. Only four had re-entered by the time of this study.

The practice of having one superintendent responsible for more than one district, common under provincial employment, has virtually ceased. This study has considered a "superintendency" to be the total responsibility of a superintendent at a given time, regardless of the number of districts supervised. A second or third superintendency, therefore, would be added as a result of a superintendent leaving one set of district responsibilities and moving to another superintendency.

Most incumbent superintendents (51, or 77.3%) have held one superintendency. The group of 15 (23.7%) who have held two or more superintendencies includes four who left the superintendency during the survey period but who subsequently returned to a similar position in another school district.

Table 1.

Year of Entry of B.C. Superintendents of Schools

Year of Entry	n	%
1979 or before	74	57.4
1980	4	3.1
1981	14	10.9
1982	4	3.1
1983	6	4.7
1984	10	7.8
1985	5	3.9
1986	12	9.3
Total	129	100.0

Departure of Superintendents

One major impetus for the present study was the concern among superintendents and others about the reportedly large number of departures in recent years. Table 2 reports frequencies of departure by year according to year of entry. Clearly, 1986 was the year in which the greatest number of departures (18) occurred. By the end of June, 1987, 54 of the 74 superintendents who were appointed in 1979 or before, almost all Ministry appointees, had left the superintendency. In addition, 13 of the 55 superintendents appointed in 1980 or later (almost all local appointees) had left.

These figures assume more significance when they are expressed as attrition rates (Table 3). They are perhaps most meaningful when full-service retirements are deducted to produce net non-retirement attrition rates. Even with retirees excluded, 1986 remains a year of very high attrition, with 15 of 75 superintendents, or 20%, leaving their positions. The effect of this large attrition has been to raise average annual net attrition rates from 4.5% for the period 1979/80 and 5.3% for the period 1981/82/83 to a noticeably higher 11.1% for 1984/85/86. Since 1987 was only half complete at the time of writing, it has not been included in these calculations.

Table 4 shows the status on departure of former superintendents, classified by year of entry. During this period, 67superintendents, or 51.9%, left their positions, although a few subsequently re-entered the superintendency.

Table 2.

Departure of B.C. Superintendents Leaving Since 1979

Year of Departure	Year of Entry						Totals	
	1979	1980	1981	1983	1984	1985	n	%
1979	5						5	7.5
1980	5						5	7.5
1981	7						7	10.4
1982	9	1					10	14.9
1983	1			1			2	3.0
1984	8		1	1			10	14.9
1985	1		3		2		6	9.0
1986	16		1	1			18	26.9
1987	2		1			1	4	6.0
Totals n	54	1	6	3	2	1	67	
%	80.6	1.5	9.0	4.5	3.0	1.5	100.0	

Table 3.

Attrition of B.C. Superintendents Offset by Retirement

Year of Departure	Number Departing	Gross Attrition Rate (%)	Retirement Departures	Net Departures	Net Attrition Rate[1.] (%)
1979	5	6.7	2	3	4.0
1980	5	6.7	1	4	5.3
1981	7	9.3	2	5	6.7
1982	10	13.3	4	6	8.0
1983	2	2.7	1	1	1.3
1984	10	13.3	5	5	6.7
1985	6	8.0	1	5	6.7
1986	18	24.0	3	15	20.0
1987	4	5.3	2	2	2.7
Totals	67		21	46	

[1.] Assumes 75 superintendencies in total

Table 4.

Initial Status After Departure of Superintendents Leaving Since 1979, by Year of Entry

Status	Year of Entry							
	1979 or before	1980	1981	1983	1984	1985	Totals n	Totals %
1. Superintendent out of B.C.	1		2				3	4.5
2. Other senior district administrator	2		1	1		1	5	7.5
3. Ministry of Education	15						15	22.4
4. Retirement	20			1			21	31.3
5. Early retirement	8		1				9	13.4
6. School administration								
7. Teaching			1				1	1.5
8. Other employment	4						4	6.0
9. Unemployment	2	1	1	1	2		7	10.4
10. Student	1						1	1.5
11. Deceased	1						1	1.5
Totals n	54	1	6	3	2	1	67[1]	
%	80.6	1.5	9.0	4.5	3.0	1.5		100.0

[1] Four of these individuals subsequently re-entered the superintendency in British Columbia.

Two findings are of particular interest. The first is that of the 46 superintendents who left for reasons other than full-service retirement, only 8 went directly to another senior school district position. Three of these individuals went to superintendencies outside British Columbia. Second, with a few exceptions, the 15 former superintendents who left for Ministry of Education employment had become superintendents in 1979 or earlier, almost all as provincial appointees. Down-sizing, Ministry reorganization and the move to local employment appear to have ended this career option for all but a few.

Table 5 provides an analysis of departures from the superintendency by year of departure and by status on departure. It provides perhaps the clearest indication of superintendents' activities immediately following their departures from their positions.

Throughout most years from 1979 to 1986, some superintendents moved from their positions to positions in the Ministry of Education. The figures shown, however, must be studied in conjunction with Table 4, which indicates clearly that this career line was open only to superintendents employed prior to the introduction of the local employment by the Ministry of Education. It is also of interest that from 1984 to 1986, when attrition was high in comparison with other periods, 20, or 74.1% of the 27 superintendents who left their positions for reasons other than full-service retirement moved out of senior school district leadership positions.

Table 5.

Initial Status After Departure of Superintendents Leaving Since 1979, by Year of Departure.

Initial Status	Left in 1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	Totals n	%
1. Superintendent out of B.C.						1		1	1	3	4.5
2. Other senior district administration				2			1	2	1	5	7.5
3. Ministry of Education	3	2	3	2		2		3		15	22.4
4. Retirement	2	1	2	4	1	5	1	3	2	21	31.3
5. Early Retirement		1	1			1	1	5		9	13.4
6. School Administration											
7. Teaching							1			1	1.5
8. Other employment		1		1		1		1		4	6.0
9. Unemployment			1	1	1		2	2		7	10.4
10. Student								1		1	1.5
11. Deceased				1						1	1.5
Totals n	5	5	7	10	2	10	6	18	4	67[1]	100.0
%	7.5	7.5	10.4	14.9	3.0	14.9	9.0	26.9	6.0		

[1]Four of these individuals subsequently re-entered the superintendency in British Columbia.

Current Status of Former Superintendents

By 1987, several changes had occurred in the group of 67 superintendents who had previously left their positions. As indicated in Table 6, only 4 had re-entered the superintendency in British Columbia. The number who had obtained superintendencies outside the province had increased from three to five and six had obtained positions as school administrators (Table 7). While six had been unemployed immediately after leaving the superintendency, only one remained in that category.

At first glance, these data may suggest a positive trend. Indeed, the findings regarding re-entry and reduction in unemployment are certainly more favourable than an opposite trend. It should be noted, however, that for many of these individuals who had built careers in education administration and had entered the superintendency with plans and hopes, other employment options were second choice at best.

A predictable outcome of the high attrition of recent years is a lowering of the average level of incumbents' experience as a superintendent. As shown in Table 8, 28, or 43.4% have less than five years experience as a superintendent, Twelve have only one year.

This section has profiled the survey group, documented the departure of superintendents and detailed the current status of superintendents who left the superintendency during the period 1979 to 1987. While the statistics can provide useful factual information about

Table 6.

Re-entry of Superintendents Following Initial Departure from the Superintendency.

Year of Initial Departure	Year of Re-entry		Totals	
	1984	1986	n	%
1981		1	1	
1982	1		1	
1985		1	1	
1986		1	1	
Total re-entering	1	3	4	6.0
Total not re-entering			63	94.0
Totals			67	100.00

Table 7.

Status on June 30, 1987 of Superintendents Leaving Since 1979.[1]

Status	Totals n	%
1. Superintendent in B.C. district	4	6.0
2. Superintendent out of B.C.	5	7.5
3. Other senior district administration	5	7.5
4. Ministry of Education	8	11.9
5. Retirement	24	35.8
6. Early retirement	2	3.0
7. School administration	6	9.0
8. Teaching	1	1.5
9. Other employment	6	9.0
10. Unemployment	1	1.5
11. Student		
12. Deceased	1	1.5
13. Unknown	4	6.0
Totals	67	100.0

[1]Four of these individuals subsequently re-entered the superintendency in British Columbia.

Table 8.

Years of Experience of Incumbent Superintendents[1] at June, 1987.

Years as Superintendent	n	%
8 or more	21	31.8
7	3	4.5
6	9	13.6
5	5	7.6
4	3	4.5
3	9	13.6
2	4	6.1
1	12	18.2
Totals	66[1]	100.0

[1]Excludes acting superintendents and vacancies.

a topic of much discussion, they cannot give the picture a human face. That aspect of the analysis of the data and exploration of the findings arises from consideration of the results of the interviews which formed the major component of the study.

Through the Eye of the Beholder: The Interview Phase of Research

The interviews with superintendents left an impression of people in charge of their situation. Clearly, they regularly faced unexpected change and development, conflict and the need to adjust plans and strategies and meet new situations. At least five aspects of the superintendency and its incumbents warrant discussion. The first and most apparent was the willingness of superintendents to commit time to an extended interview in a period marked by fast-breaking legislative change and a surge of conflict within the system. Each one kept his or her appointment. The clear impression was of administrators "on top" of their work.

Second, the interviews were marked by frankness and a willingness of superintendents to provide necessary background, some of it sensitive and confidential. Much of this background served to create the third impression; that of a full and taxing job. This dimension will be reviewed in greater depth in a later section of the report.

Fourth, superintendents were remarkably consistent in their analyses of the current situation and the job itself. Their perspectives and examples varied, and the details changed with the

setting and the situation, but the perceptions were for the most part clear and consistent on the major strands and issues.

Finally, one could not help but be impressed by superintendents' feelings about the job. Conflict and the need to manage it, contain it, defuse it and sometimes provoke it were always present. Change and surprise were expected and accepted as part of the job. Some superintendents, on reflection, wondered aloud what the future might hold, and many conveyed the enthusiasm expressed by the superintendent of a volatile, often unpredictable school district:

> I still believe that it's an extremely exciting, fulfilling job. There are risks, there's jeopardy, but it's a tremendous job.

The nature of the job, the need for a coherent personal philosophy to create a context for leadership, the importance of initiative and planning, the need for management capability of a new order, the importance of communication and teambuilding and the critical requirement for political skill loomed large in the interviews. They are the focus of the following sections.

The Current Scene

The social, economic and political contexts of public education and the demands on superintendents are changing. Both superintendents and trustee respondents agreed that a different profile is emerging for trustees and their boards. A board chairman, in reference to his own city district, observed that

> There's a change in skill level, dedication level. They have had previous experience in community

> leadership. They make no excuse for the fact that they represent a broad base of community influence. There have been, understandably, some jitters raised in the minds of some long-term administrators. Fifty percent [of these trustees] have no experience of administration with a Ministry-appointed superintendent--they look at a CEO the way a CEO would be looked at outside of education.

A superintendent observed that "boards have changed a hell of a lot--there's no buffaloing them. They're changing in character." It was evident from the responses of superintendents that the changes in boards demanded all of the traditional skills and an array of new, or at least newly prominent skills.

Changing boards, fiscal restraint and economic pressures and a public increasingly skeptical of institutions and administrators have presented superintendents with new challenges. The trend toward appointment of the superintendent as chief executive officer has in itself created new demands for administrative leadership. A respondent observed that superintendents must "know and understand funding formulas, revenue sources, etc., and be able to revise their understandings quickly." Another observed that superintendents

> have entered a level of leadership and management that is unprecedented in this province . . . if he doesn't understand a balance sheet, he can't lead the secretary-treasurer--he needs the skills to direct all aspects.

Not only issues related to role change, but also those related to the changing character of society were seen as creating new demands. New issues ranging from AIDS and child abuse to a new order of board-employee relationships were cited as evidence of the requirement for a new level of leadership.

The demands of the job were cited frequently by respondents. Clearly, the position is a consuming task. One highly experienced and respected superintendent stated

> "I don't understand--I'm continually amazed that one person can be on top of so many different kinds of things at once. You can't let yourself get consumed by any one thing--the job <u>is</u> consuming, though."

This theme was echoed by many respondents, but few appeared to consider themselves victims of events and circumstances on which they could have no influence. Board and committee meetings and other district responsibilities were heavy consumers of time, and for some, community duties were seen as an important extension of the position. When asked about personal time, one respondent replied ". . . almost none. The evening meetings, the weekend meetings--I try, because I think it's a responsibility, to do something in the community. Those links are <u>so</u> important."

For all who commented, the greatest pressure in the search for enough time to do the job effectively was on the superintendent's personal and family time. Several mentioned strategies they used to gain time for recreational activity: "I work hard, but I'm conscious that I work hard. You've got to consciously build some things in. A lot of people don't know how to cope with the work." One respondent commented on the demands of the job on not only himself, but also his staff, somewhat philosophically:

> It's an all-consuming job, there's no doubt, but perhaps it's partly a function of the type of person we are. . . . I worry more about the people who report to me than I do about myself--the flexibility provides some compensation.

Several respondents acknowledged that job demands often took precedence over their efforts to maintain a balanced schedule. Where a priority was expressed, it was that they be able to stay abreast of developments and changes occurring on a broad front, often in areas not traditionally required of superintendents in this province. The superintendent of a small northern district commented

> I do homework like you wouldn't believe. I research, I investigate, I find out things. The only time I move fast is when there's no option. . . . I studied labour negotiations literature, I looked at what was happening. I don't have the time, but I can't afford not to.

Consistently, when superintendents expressed a concern about the availability of time, doing an effective job was the predominant goal. There was no clear relationship between district size and pressures on the superintendent. Although small districts lacked support staff, the dynamics of the school district itself--community, staff relations and board stance--seemed equally significant. One superintendent commented that

> There are times when I've been going flat out over the past few years, I've felt increasingly unable to get everything done that has to be done. I want to keep my hands firmly on the tiller, and lately I've been feeling that my hands have been getting a little slippery. It's a frustration of this job--I can't even read the stuff that I'm supposed to read anymore.

Perhaps it is in the nature of many senior leaders to be regularly self-examining, reflecting and offering challenges to oneself. The same superintendent who made the comment recorded above also reported outstanding results on a recent broadly-based evaluation of his performance by both trustees and principals and outlined a

comprehensive set of initiatives being undertaken by himself and a very small staff to promote education in the community.

The researcher's own experience as a superintendent, a knowledge of the major events of the past several years in education in this province and the impressions gained from interviews with superintendents suggest that many of these officials have provided considerable stability in uncertain times. One commented that

> These are the people who have held the system together for the past six or seven years. They haven't always agreed, but they've held it together.

Changes in employment relationships, in trustees and boards, in social, political and economic parameters and in the demands on superintendents appear to have contributed to the departure of some who have left the superintendency.

The first seven years of the local employment option, 1980 through 1986, saw the departure of 63 superintendents. The net attrition after full-service retirement was 42. It seems reasonable to assume that the major change in the employment relationship, newly-gained control over appointment and tenure by boards inexperienced in local employment of the superintendent and new demands on the superintendent were important factors in the departure of some. A further factor may have been the Ministry requirement that the initial local employment contract first be offered to the incumbent provincial appointee. In some instances, this individual may not have been the Board's unfettered first choice. It seems likely, although it cannot readily be inferred from the data, that a combination of these factors was operative prior to departure in some instances.

There appeared to be a view among some respondents that some of the changes were to have been expected. One suggested that "Maybe we just had to go through that process." Another suggested that some "people who had been in a while hadn't adapted" to changing circumstances. A third felt that the climate and program of fiscal restraint had exacerbated problems, and one stated that some departures represented "the end of the honeymoon" which had begun with the new marriage of employment by boards.

It was difficult to gain precise information about the departure of those superintendents whose appointments were terminated by the Board. In some instances, a mutual agreement had been reached between the Board and the superintendent that all details of the circumstances surrounding departure would remain confidential. In some instances, respondents simply did not want to discuss in depth a painful incident from the past.

In a few instances, superintendents were able to speak about their separation. In two of the cases reviewed, regardless of the appropriateness of termination, there appeared to have been a lack of any due process. These respondents reported that without prior warning or formal evaluation, they had simply been told that their appointments had been terminated.

A third superintendent, whose departure had been mutually arranged after the board's indication that it wished to terminate the employment relationship, referred to a previous circumstance relating to board action on a key matter of administration with which the superintendent had disagreed as "the beginning of the long downhill slide." A board

chairman observed that "I don't think there's any going back" once the relationship between the board and the superintendent has begun to deteriorate.

That a board will and should employ the superintendent it chooses seemed not in dispute among the respondents who commented. Several did, however, express strongly the view that careful selection and contract development, a formal performance evaluation program and provision for at least a fair hearing before the whole board in the event of difficulties arising were reasonable expectations and important components of the employment relationship.

Clearly, the circumstances and expectations of the superintendency in this province have changed substantially. For some, the new rules and roles have not worn well. For many, the position provides a stimulating and challenging mix of demand and reward, of frustration and achievement, and of conflict and compromise. From all, the job demands much. Respondents had clear perceptions of the essential skills and qualities of the superintendent who will provide sound leadership in the coming years.

Superintendents for Tomorrow

Respondents spoke definitely about the personal qualities and the background of skills and knowledge needed by today's and tomorrow's superintendent. Superintendents and other respondents were remarkably consistent in their perceptions. Personal philosophy and leadership style, leadership initiative and planning, management knowledge and capability, communication and team-building skills, and the skills of

political statesmanship were each addressed by many respondents. Numerous comments suggested that the qualities and skills the respondents cited were essential to a superintendent's success and, in fact, to survival in the position.

Personal Philosophy and Leadership Style

Respondents' views of the person in the job related to the existence of a well-developed philosophy of education and life itself, integrity and honesty, and a respect for trusteeship and lay governance. Each of these attributes was deemed basic and essential by respondents.

Several respondents asserted that to be successful over the long term the superintendent must first have a clearly-developed, "well thought out personal philosophy of life, of administration," to quote one respondent, who also suggested that

> maybe when Boards say there's no leadership, they don't realize they have a problem with a person who hasn't a well-developed philosophy.

One superintendent stated that successful superintendents will be "basically positive, happy, comfortable with themselves." Another noted the importance of a personal philosophy in dealing with difficult times on the job:

> You've got to be pretty bloody self-confident. When people won't buy your ideas, when they criticize you in public, if you don't know where you're going, how can you lead anyone? Too many don't really know what they stand for, what they are known for.

Only if one's personal base is established, stated some, is it possible to decide "what is really a matter of principle--you've got to

figure that out." The importance of this ability to distinguish was expressed by one superintendent as

> You have to be careful not to take too much as personal. You've got to ask, "Is it really going to matter in the cold light of day?" and often you have to say it isn't. You can't, however, back off making decisions.

The importance of assertiveness on some issues was pointed out by one superintendent who stated that

> You have to put your own job on the line sometimes, and I do, but I pick my spots, I pick my issues.

Integrity and honesty were recurring themes among both superintendents and non-superintendents. In particular, straightforwardness with the Board was stressed. Several superintendents referred to their own practice in dealing with this issue, one saying, "I believe that one of my great strengths has always been my honesty--the trustees know I'm honest." Another dimension of integrity, the provision of information to all trustees, was expressed by a superintendent who said "When we come to the table, everybody knows where they're at--when it comes to the board, there are no surprises." A third stated, "If I could give advice to a new superintendent, it would be not to keep anything from the board."

In contrast, one superintendent spoke of the work of a terminated predecessor as communicated by the board when they set guidelines and expectations for the new superintendent:

> He played both ends against the middle and always to the detriment of both. We had nothing but game-playing, surprises, lack of information and wrong information. We were embarrassed in public, we were hung out to dry through misinformation.

Five respondents asserted the importance of respect for trusteeship. One superintendent stated directly, "You have to go into this business and believe in lay control of public education, otherwise you shouldn't be in the superintendency." The long-serving superintendent of a large urban school district distinguished between the person and the office: "I have utmost respect for the school trustee, even if I have no respect for the incumbent." The phrases "believe in" and "utmost respect" suggest a fundamental attitude toward trusteeship, one which will pervade the actions and attitudes of the superintendent. To quote one respondent, "The arrogance of a contempt which is reflected in private conversations can't be hidden."

Leadership Initiative and Planning

The importance of a proactive, goal-directed approach to leadership was stressed by over half of the superintendents interviewed. All who commented spoke of the need for a plan which would establish direction and enable demands and developments to be kept in proper perspective. One superintendent commented on the board's view of planning skills by saying that

> They want someone who's got a vision, a plan, is creating. Most trustees want to be part of something that's going to be good for education.

The importance of not only developing plans but also communicating them was stressed by several respondents who were of the view that boards want an overall plan, a sense of purpose, that "They like having that sense of direction, they really do, and it's good for us, too."

Clearly, boards expect from their superintendents, recommendations, options and implications of various alternatives. They will not always accept the recommended alternative, but the responsibility to plan remains. One superintendent commented that

> I rarely let a matter rest with a board without a recommendation. If I give them alternatives, I have to give them implications, and that's what they often don't like.

Some commented that despite the possibility of negative response and unaccepted recommendations, the alternative of simply presenting a problem or a set of alternatives without recommendations and implications was not acceptable. At the same time, the quality of recommendations and the accuracy over time of predicted outcomes was seen as one dimension of a superintendent's competence:

> When they approve a policy, and there are unanticipated consequences, you look bad, because you're supposed to be able to anticipate consequences.

One trustee, commenting on the work of a superintendent no longer in the district, observed that "there was a lack of leadership and direction--in a year, no goals were set." Clearly, a proactive stance toward planning was seen as a critical leadership dimension.

Management Knowledge and Capability

The need for management knowledge and capability has been alluded to in earlier comments about the superintendent's role in relation to the district's business operation. Particularly for the chief executive officer, the ability to direct a complex organization of many disparate

units is an emerging demand. A trustee commented that "It's those kinds of skills that will make a superintendent worth every dollar."

Not only do today's superintendents face demands for new knowledge and capability, they face them with increasing frequency and urgency. The respondents in this study were keenly aware of the extent of demands on their expertise and of their own need to learn. One experienced city superintendent commented that

> If anybody's going to survive in this business for very long, it's going to depend on their style of leadership--there aren't many people around who have that kind of skill.

Communication and Team-Building Skills

Several superintendents of long and apparently successful experience reflected on the importance of building and communicating with a leadership team. Their opportunities to develop such a team varied widely; as a result, its make-up also varied. For some superintendents of very small districts with a few scattered schools, the job is very much a solitary experience. In large metropolitan districts, even efficiency of operation demands a carefully developed team operation.

Many respondents indicated a view of the importance of team-building. It was clear that for some, there existed many teams with different members and different purposes. One superintendent commented that

> The job is too big for any one person--you can't do it by yourself. You could work 48 hours a day, provide all the systems you like . . . Over a period of time, you develop a base: board, teachers--you develop a bond, mostly of trust. You know the community leaders . . .That team isn't just your senior leadership team; it's the principals, the

> [district parents association], parents at large, community support groups . . . I believe so much in process, I frustrate the guys who work with me. I think you should see as much as you can before you go there. We map out the process, go over it and over it, revisit it again and again.

Political Statesmanship

No other aspect of the superintendent's job drew as many comments as did the political role of the superintendent, The nuances and dimensions of the political role and the skills needed to deal with that role pervaded many of the discussions. Yet superintendents were careful to delimit their use of the word "political", and generally they expressed a common definition. In each instance, their comments distinguished between political astuteness and statesmanship on the one hand and "playing politics" on the other. "Playing politics" was seen as a deadly game and a road with no route back. One superintendent observed that "I try to draw a distinction between being politically astute and being political," another that today's superintendent must "operate in a political environment without being political."

Several superintendents commented on the importance of knowing and understanding the board. They stressed the fact that knowing is a process, not a project or an event:

> You have to be aware of what's going on--aware of what's going on with trustees, among themselves, with their constituents, helping them with that--taking a little blame for them, often without them knowing it . . . A lot of trustees operate in a way that isn't tied in to the reality of the teacher and the classroom. The superintendent has to help them make the right decisions on the information.

A trustee stated, "I really do try to know my board members--as much about them as possible." Several respondents stressed that not only full communication, but also equal communication with all is important. The board is both the employer and one of the group with whom the superintendent works most closely. Current knowledge and understanding, and intervention and correction as necessary, are vital.

The matter of sensitivity is difficult to analyze. It is multi-dimensional and somewhat elusive in meaning, and the term was used by superintendents to describe a state of acute awareness and responsiveness to change in attitude or in feeling. Again, board members were a primary reference group, and superintendents were aware of the need to be alert:

> I'm really sensitively attuned to how trustees feel--you have to know when to back off, when there are sensitivities.

Another superintendent, commenting on the public role of the trustee, suggested that "You've got to be sensitive to the fact that trustees are very vulnerable." Several commented on the importance of ensuring that the public image of the trustee is maintained. One stated,

> I never embarrass a trustee in public. I'll take all kinds of lumps, then I'll go to the trustee after the meeting and tell him. You never cross swords with a trustee in a public setting, but when the meeting is over you go to him, and I think there's a mutual respect that grows.

Finally, superintendents showed a keen awareness of the need to adjust for the unexpected, to "shift gears" on a moment's notice, to change strategy when circumstances change. Perhaps this dimension of

political statesmanship is the most crucial in times when the need to be flexible is paramount: "Course correction is a constant adjustment thing." None referred to this adjustment as a relinquishing of basic principles or plans; all were aware of the importance of timing.

Perhaps it is a truism to observe that where people are involved, the unexpected will surface. The complexity of human behavior and events presents constant challenges to the superintendent. One respondent expressed the importance of being able to analyze events and situations, observing that

> incidents are not unrelated. Everything's a triple-bank shot. You need to be able to get back from the situation . . . and think your way out of it--but you can never simplify it.

It is virtually impossible when confronted with the complex, multi-dimensional nature of the superintendent's work to analyze it with fullness and accuracy. Perhaps an extended internship or a mentorship relationship would help to provide the added dimension. One superintendent attributed his ability to perceive and analyze to a thorough grounding in systems theory. Some were less sure of the primary sources of their skill. One credited his own former superintendent for much of his learning:

> I watched carefully a man that I thought was very good. I didn't always understand what was going on, but I always knew it was important.

The Superintendency in Other Provinces

The significance of current issues in the superintendency might be assessed by considering the British Columbia situation in the context of a description of the scene across Canada. The researcher wrote to the Deputy Minister of Education in all other provinces except Prince Edward Island, which was excluded because of its size. A respondent from another province did convey one piece of data about Prince Edward Island. He indicated that both the superintendent and assistant superintendent had recently left a major district in that province on relatively short notice. This respondent stated that these events had caused concern in the community and the province and that the Minister was inquiring into the actions of the board in the matter.

Each provincial representative was asked whether there had been changes in the employment status of superintendents in the past twenty years, their current status, and whether there had been any recent period when rates of turnover and attrition had seemed excessively high.

Employment Relationships

In all eight provinces contacted, superintendents (directors, in some provinces) are employed by school boards. In most cases, this history is a lengthy one; in Quebec, school board autonomy has been entrenched since 1867. It appears that prior to British Columbia, the most recent province to "go local" was Alberta, where local employment

was introduced in 1970. Saskatchewan made a major move in this direction in 1982.

Only two anomalies appeared within this situation. In Saskatchewan, provincial superintendents in six very small rural districts are presently being phased out. In Alberta, one very small (12-pupil) district in a national park and one expansive northern district are provincially administered. Alberta has placed Ministry appointees in some districts on an acting basis during a long search.

There were three indications of provincial involvement of other kinds. In Nova Scotia, provincial legislation was introduced in 1981 to specify that the superintendent would be the chief executive officer of the board. In New Brunswick and Newfoundland, superintendents' salaries are set by the Province according to a scale based on teachers' salaries plus an administrative allowance. Superintendents have no involvement in determining the amount of this allowance.

While the developmental history has varied among the provinces, British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan appear, according to respondents, to be the only provinces to have undergone major change in the past twenty years.

Alberta moved to local employment as a result of the Education Act of 1970. In Saskatchewan, the Minister announced in 1982 that the government would no longer be appointing superintendents. The number of provincial superintendents in Saskatchewan has been reduced to six, as noted above.

Turnover and Attrition

Five of the eight provinces contacted need only brief mention. Nova Scotia reported "no visible discontent," stating that superintendents in that province have an association within the Nova Scotia Teachers' Union, which bargains their salaries.

In Newfoundland, a few districts have experienced frequent turnover, some apparently related to isolation and some to unique problems of inter-parish conflict in separate school districts.

One of the larger districts in Manitoba, which has a history of being highly politicized, in a recent period had three superintendents in five years. With that exception, Manitoba superintendents were reported as having had "relatively lengthy tenure." The respondent from Saskatchewan perceived no pattern of excessive attrition.

The situation in Quebec seemed unique, in that while termination is highly unusual, superintendents (directeurs) and other district administrators are encouraged to leave at a relatively early age, through a system of reclassification and reassignment. A program of incentives such as pre-retirement financial aid and payment of the first six months of one's salary in a private company have been factors in establishing an average age for senior administrators of about fifty years.

There appear to have been some similarities between the post-1970 situation in Alberta and that in British Columbia after 1979, although the degree of turbulence appears to have been considerably less in Alberta. This may have been due in part to differences in the basic character of the two provinces. Also, the situation in Alberta in the

early 1970s was not complicated by other major changes such as those experienced in British Columbia in respect to education finance.

New Brunswick has both French (thirteen) and English (twenty-seven) boards. The Ministry respondent indicated that six of the 27 English superintendents had left their positions in 1985. Five had left in 1986 and two in the first four months of 1987. These numbers and the respondent's comment that "There has been an undercurrent of unrest among superintendents in the province," prompted the researcher to contact an official of the superintendents' association.

This superintendent concurred that the matter of superintendents' tenure was "a hot topic" and stated that there existed in the province "a preoccupation with that." He attributed the problem in large measure to the increased politicization of school boards, which had themselves been under pressure from the provincial government and special interest groups.

Provincial government initiatives which threatened New Brunswick boards with changes in their roles, were reported as leading to the formation of coalitions among boards and between boards and other groups to seek modifications in proposed reforms. It was suggested that this factor may have contributed both to the politicization of school boards and to turnover among superintendents.

In the view of this respondent, the problem

> . . . basically boils down to poor relationships with the school boards. You can't blame it on restraint--we can manage, and even accommodate some growth. There definitely has been a lot of difficulty between superintendents and boards, resulting in many having left their positions.

He also expressed a concern about loss of talent from the system:

> Two have resigned so far this year, one a very prominent and effective principal before. The other seemed to be up and coming--this has happened every year, and we've lost some very good ones.

Both respondents reported that New Brunswick superintendents operate without contracts and have no provision for due process in the event of a dispute, problems for which the superintendents were seeking remedies in legislation.

The New Brunswick situation appears to parallel in some respects the British Columbia experience. Both provinces have experienced the politization of school boards. In neither case do superintendents have a guarantee of the basic elements of due process, except that the British Columbia superintendent may be able to negotiate such provisions in an employment contract.

Only Ontario reported any provision for due process in the event of serious problems occurring between superintendent and board. Regulation 276 (7-14) of the Education Act for that province sets out specific requirements which include a performance review, a formal hearing process and a severance pay provision. Although it seems unlikely that a superintendent would be permitted to remain in the district after the process described had been carried out,, or in fact would wish to stay, the procedures may help to guard against capricious action.

Superintendent Search and Selection Procedures

The change of employer from Ministry to school board in British Columbia in the years following 1979 meant that boards had to establish and carry out their own executive search processes. This was a new experience, and was acknowledged by several respondents as one of the most important processes and decisions of a school trustee's tenure. One school board chairman involved in a selection process after the termination of the previous superintendent, said:

> The toughest thing I've had to do, the most onerous decision I've had to take part in since I was elected was helping to choose a superintendent of schools. Choosing a CEO is no small matter. When you leave the board, you leave the district with the superintendent you helped to choose.

An experienced assistant superintendent expressed the view that "The most important decision a board will ever make is the selection of the next superintendent--unquestionably." Clearly, the issue was more than peripheral in the view of many respondents.

Respondents who were familiar with procedures used in recent searches were positive in their comments about some and sharply critical of others. Their concerns might be categorized as speaking to questions of rationality, fairness and confidentiality.

Rationality

Respondents cited some specific procedures and events which one termed "amateurish damned things." In one instance, an individual was

phoned for information regarding an applicant by an individual who would ultimately be reporting to the successful candidate. The caller was unable to answer when asked if the respondent's name had been given as a reference. The questions were non-standard, and open-ended in the extreme, including, "Can you tell me anything about (the person)?"

On being questioned, the caller stated that several people were checking on candidates. Trustees telephoned trustees, staff contacted staff and these groups were further subdivided to ensure that males called males and females called females! After the initial discussion had concluded, the caller provided the names of all other "long-listed" candidates and asked again if any information could be provided.

In contrast, an individual was called by a trustee from another district who had been assigned all of the preliminary reference-checking. She had a carefully structured, progressively detailed set of questions which, on completion, left the respondent feeling that he had been able to give a complete, balanced and valid profile of the candidate.

A practice about which opinions varied was that of gathering all short-listed candidates together (in some instances with their spouses) for a dinner or board social. In one instance, seats between the candidates were occupied by trustees, who changed location periodically throughout the meal to meet with each candidate.

The researcher spoke to five candidates who had participated in this multiple informal interview. Two had been successful in the competition and stated their feeling that the procedure was fair and

acceptable. The three who were not offered positions expressed negative views, with one terming it "a farce."

Fairness

The strongest concern expressed by respondents related to situations in which they felt that the selection decision had essentially been made by the board before the interviews, perhaps very early in the search process. All agreed that the selection decision was the board's exclusively; one asserted the board's right simply to pick a candidate from "a pool of one."

All, however, expressed the view that if a selection had already been made, a search and selection process should not have been carried out. Perhaps a logical extension of this would be to suggest that if the Board reaches a decision before the process in concluded, the selection should be finalized and the process terminated.

On another rationality and fairness-related issue, a large group of candidates for a superintendency, assuming that the standard practice of paying travel expenses for invited candidates would be followed, were advised on post-interview submission of receipts that this was not the case. This problem, though corrected by board policy for any subsequent searches, might have been averted by use of a more comprehensive search and selection guide.

Confidentiality

In most instances where a senior executive officer is seeking or has been solicited for a position elsewhere, it is not in the best

interests of either the individual or the present employer to be aware of that fact too early in the process. The expression "lame duck" was used by one respondent to describe an individual whose search for other employment was too widely known at an early stage in the process.

Perhaps there exists a shared responsibility: that of the applicant to indicate the degree of confidentiality of his/her application, and that of the searching organization to maintain it.

Complicating this situation is the trend to wider involvement of stakeholder groups in the search and selection process. Teachers, support staff administrators, and in some cases community members might legitimately be invited to assist the board. In some instances, consultation might relate to the needs of the district and the desirable qualifications of a superintendent. In others, representatives of these groups might be directly involved in the review of applications.

It would appear that unless careful choices of committee members are made, guidelines specified clearly and ethical practices agreed upon in advance, the risk of breach of confidentiality is increased. One respondent, expressing concern with this aspect of some searches, asserted that "confidentiality is absolutely a non-existent thing."

In any search for information about a topic, existing concerns are likely to surface early and perhaps with considerable emphasis. The data did not suggest that the foregoing problems were universal. They were perceived by some respondents to be widespread, and the specific examples given and intensity of feeling expressed warranted their inclusion in this report.

Much investigation has been carried out regarding the search process. Some consulting firms specialize in it or maintain an executive search division. Useful reference material (Department of Educational Administration, 1977; Kratzmann and James, 1978) is available to assist school boards with superintendent search and selection. In British Columbia, search assistance is also available from the Ministry of Education and advice, as on other board-related matters, from the B.C. School Trustees Association.

The search and selection process is both crucial and potentially problematic. The relative recency of local employment may have contributed to the development of a situation similar to that of Alberta in the 1970s, where local employment was introduced in 1971. This situation was described in "Guidelines for Employment of School Superintendents" as follows:

> The role of the superintendent has generally not been clearly defined either by government legislation or by school board policy. Different groups--trustees, secretary-treasurers, senior administrators, teachers--hold varying and often conflicting expectations for the behavior of the superintendent. School trustees have had too little time to define the role as they perceive it, and this, together with the lack of systematic recruitment and selection procedures, has sometimes led to inadequate employment practices and to stressful working relationships (Department of Educational Administration, 1977, p. 5).

The steps leading up to selection are the first in a board-superintendent relationship. Respondents' comments suggest that it would be a mistake to overlook the significance of these initial steps. One board chairman, in reference to a superintendent terminated by the

board, said, "I've always maintained that the problem was the hiring process--he shouldn't have been here in the first place."

If one acknowledges the importance to both parties of a "fit" between superintendent and board, the significance of search and selection seems apparent:

> Just as accepting a superintendency may be one of the most critical decisions which an educational administrator faces, so also the choice of a superintendent is one of the most important decisions that a school board must make. Consequently, both parties should approach the choice with full awareness of the significance of the decision and should take steps to ensure that the decision will be the right one for both the individual and the school system. (Department of Educational Administration, 1977, p. 5).

Conclusion

The perspective provided by examining the history of the superintendency in North America suggests that much of what we perceive as new may only be new in actual detail. For the men and women in the superintendency in British Columbia, though, the reality of tomorrow is that it will be qualitatively different than yesterday and today in this position. At least for this and the next generation of superintendents, tomorrow will demand new skills and capabilities. Today's superintendents have expressed clearly and succinctly their perceptions of the essentials of the position. This study has sought to explain the current scene, to heighten understanding of the nature of the superintendency and to suggest some essential skills for the future. Some recommendations flow from the findings; the following section will present these with tomorrow's superintendency in mind.

PROSPECTS: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has sought to clarify the current situation in the school superintendency in British Columbia, to explore problems surrounding the recent history of turnover and attrition and to relate the situation in British Columbia to events and patterns elsewhere in Canada. It has focussed on both the present scene and respondents' perceptions of the key skills of tomorrow's superintendent.

Clearly, the recent scene has been one of turmoil in the superintendency. Superintendents, many of them previously employed as district superintendents by the Ministry of Education, negotiated first contracts with boards for whom the experience was as new as it was for many superintendents themselves. The transition to local employment was itself conditional: the first contract must be offered to the incumbent provincially-employed superintendent.

Both superintendents and boards had requested and lobbied for local employment for several years. For many, the change proved satisfying and a new era of teamwork and joint effort was launched by a board and a superintendent whose common purpose had been affirmed and strengthened.

For some, the experience of local employment was less than optimum; for others it was disastrous. Table 3 shows clearly that for at least three recent years, the conditions in the superintendency were turbulent for many.

To comment further on the reasons for this turbulence would be less than useful except as the focus would be on optimizing conditions

in the superintendency for the future. Several recommendations arise from the findings; all seek to use the circumstances of the present and the recent past as a basis for enhancing the future of the superintendency in British Columbia. Most focus on the employment relationship between the board and the superintendent and on the pre-service preparation of new superintendents.

Recruitment, Search and Selection

The employment relationship between a board and a superintendent of schools begins with the first decisions about and steps toward filling the vacancy. Each phase of the process: needs assessment, advertising, soliciting of applications, initial screening, reference checking, provision of information to applicants, interviewing and selection is an impression-creating, relationship-developing initiative. The responses of some have suggested that the first seeds of great success or of future difficulty are sown during recruitment and selection.

It is important that there be a consistent, rational and widely-accepted set of recruitment and selection procedures for superintendents. Reference materials and qualified assistance in developing such guidelines are readily available, often from superintendents themselves. The community of interest between superintendents and school boards, however, suggests that for such a project to be successful, it must be a joint effort:

Recommendation 1:

That the ABCSS, in conjunction with school board representatives, seek to develop a set of comprehensive and practical guidelines for the recruitment and selection of superintendents of schools.

Recommendation 2:

That steps be taken by the ABCSS in partnership with board representatives to publicize and promote these guidelines and to ensure that early support is available to boards planning to embark on a search and selection process.

As the figures in Table 8 have shown, almost half of incumbent superintendents have less than five years' experience in the position. Twelve entered in 1986 alone. A small number may have had prior experience as a superintendent, while others have entered directly from the principalship. Some have had no experience on a district staff or working with school boards.

Recommendation 3:

That boards establish a desired background of experience for a potential superintendent and seek to ensure that the candidate's background is indicative of likely success in working with an elected board of school trustees.

The appointment of a superintendent of schools is a key decision for a board of school trustees. The process of search and selection is intensive, requiring careful planning at the outset and close attention throughout. It is suggested that a degree of external assistance be engaged by boards to ensure close attention to each step in the process.

Regardless of the board's decision about the nature and extent of outside involvement, the issue might be addressed according to the model shown in Figure 3. This model specifies four major aspects of the search and selection process, and permits the board to specify the level and kind of support required. It assumes that the board will require a degree of external advice and will use the guidelines proposed in Recommendation 1. It represents only the most basic decisions necessary before the search process can begin.

Guidelines For Employment

Once a selection has been made, the development of a contract becomes an important early activity. The process will vary among superintendents and boards. Some will use the services of a lawyer or other agent, some will work independently. The contract is a crucial document, and for those working without specialized assistance, some basic advice seems essential:

Recommendation 4:

> That the ABCSS publish, with legal assistance, advice and basic guidelines for the negotiation of a contract of employment, and that such guidelines include an encouragement to seek qualified assistance.

Consideration of due process seems unsuited to discussions at the time of hiring. Recent history, however, suggests that clarification of this aspect of employment is in the best interests of both the superintendent and the board. There appear to be two alternatives: to seek the placement in legislation of a guarantee of at least the basic

Parties Involved	Search Aspect			
	Process Management	District/Position Needs Assessment	Screening	Interviewing
Board[1.]				
Outside Consultant				
Senior Staff				
Employee[2.] Groups	X			
Community[2.] Representatives	X			

1. Assumed to include "Board committee as appropriate."

2. "Employee groups" and "Community representatives" have been excluded from the model for "Process management," which differs in kind from the remaining search aspects.

Figure 3. Basic Design of the Superintendent Search and Selection Process.

elements of due process (i.e. a hearing before the whole board) in the event of major difficulties in the employment relationship, or to ensure that such guidelines are included in contracts of employment. The choice of a preferred alternative would be a policy decision of the ABCSS.

Recommendation 5:

> That the ABCSS study the Ontario guidelines regarding the terms of employment for superintendents of schools (directors of education) to determine the advisability of seeking similar legislative or contractual guidelines relating to superintendents and boards in this province.

Few would argue that periodic feedback about the quality of one's performance on the job is important to growth and to ensuring mutual satisfaction. The importance of formal evaluation for superintendents is emphasized by the fact that the priorities of the board will change over time and that the membership of the employing board itself may change substantially with an election. The writer is aware that some legal opinion advises against formal evaluation; the matter needs resolution.

Recommendation 6:

> That boards and superintendents ensure that the contract of employment provides a process for regular and equitable formal evaluation.

Recommendation 7:

That boards and superintendents ensure that provisions for basic elements of due process in the event of major difficulties in the employment relationship are included in the contract of employment; that such guidelines focus first on problem resolution and second on guidelines to be followed in the event that a major difficulty cannot be resolved.

The foregoing recommendations are intended to provide a framework within which attention can be focussed on the matter at hand: the education of children. It is felt that by ensuring that basic components of the employment relationship are handled systematically and, where appropriate, in advance, primacy of effort can be given to educational leadership by both superintendents and boards.

Preparation For The Superintendency

The preparation of superintendents beyond the usual requirements of graduate education and administrative experience is a matter worthy of attention. The experience of recent years, early retirement provisions and a range of other factors may contribute to a shortage of qualified candidates for the superintendency. In-service training is reasonably available, but pre-service experiences of the kind likely to contribute to success on the job by supplementing education and career experience are less available.

Recommendation 8:

That the ABCSS explore ways of providing pre-service experiences such as intensive short-term training or internships which will assist newly-appointed superintendents in successful entry.

Further study of the superintendency in the area of critical skill requirements is important. In particular, the political statesmanship role of the superintendent needs closer examination. The area is difficult to define and the skills are in all likelihood difficult to develop, but the role is crucial.

CONCLUSION

The study has generated much factual data about the current scene in the superintendency in British Columbia. It has sought to interpret that information and beyond that, to examine the superintendency through the eyes of the men and women who live it in the present and who will live it in the future.

The task of leadership in uncertain times places high demands on all who would accept it, and exacts a high cost from some. The path ahead in education, and indeed, in our society, is unclear. What is clear is that there are those who will lead; what is necessary is that the best leaders be attracted, nurtured and enabled to work effectively with boards, employees, staffs and communities towards a common purpose: the education of children.

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